

Timaru District Council

Submission on the draft Aotearoa New Zealand Government Tourism Strategy

To the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Introduction

1. The Timaru District Council thanks the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment for the opportunity to submit on the draft Aotearoa New Zealand Government Tourism Strategy.
2. This submission is made by the Timaru District Council, 2 King George Place, Timaru. The contact person is Damon Odey, Mayor of the Timaru District. I can be contacted at Timaru District Council, phone (03) 687 7200 or PO Box 522, Timaru 7940.

Tourism in Timaru District

3. The Timaru District Council is a local authority in the South Island serving over 46,000 people in South Canterbury. The main settlement is Timaru, with other smaller settlements of Geraldine, Pleasant Point and Temuka.
4. Situated in the centre of the eastern South Island, the Timaru District is well placed on State Highway 1 for visitors and is a gateway to the lakes and mountains of the central South Island.
5. Timaru sits roughly two and a half hours south of Christchurch and north of Dunedin on State Highway 1. Geraldine is approximately two hours south west of Christchurch on State Highway 79, on the way to Aoraki/Mount Cook and Queenstown. Both towns are popular stop off points for travellers by car and bus. Geraldine especially benefits from a strong flow of domestic and international visitors and the retail sector of the town is geared to cater for these tourists.
6. Tourism has consistently contributed over 4% of the District's GDP for the past 18 years and both the domestic and international market spend have increased along with the total guest nights in recent years.
7. The tourism spend data for the year to November 2018 provided by the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) shows that the majority of the spend in the region comes from domestic travellers, \$176 million of the total \$226 million spent. Visitors from Canterbury and Otago contribute the most, with the majority of spend being on retail, petrol and food and beverage.

8. International visitors spent \$49 million in the 2018 year, with the Australia (\$13 million) and China (\$4 million) the largest contributors.
9. A recent desktop review of tourism provision in the District, undertaken by consultants Visitor Solutions, revealed there are few products set up to cater for the international markets, however the domestic market appears well catered for with potential for development, particularly in the form of outdoor recreation and local events.
10. As a member of the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, Mayor Damon Odey helps lead the Canterbury Regional Economic Development Strategy (CREDS). The strategy includes seven different work programmes, including a regional visitor strategy.
11. The objective of the regional visitor strategy is to “grow sustainable tourism that focuses on the high-end market, encourages a wider season ‘spread’, disperses visitors across the region and South Island, and keeps them here longer.”
12. The Canterbury Mayoral Forum is also leading the development of a South Island Destination Management Plan, collaborating with all South Island Mayoral Forums and Regional Tourism Operators. By recognising how visitors flow through our regions the Plan will identify the infrastructure we need to cater for current and projected visitor flows, and ensure that tourism and its associated infrastructure benefits our communities.
13. Council endorses and works to achieve the objectives of the CREDS regional visitor strategy and the South Island Destination Management Plan. To advance this work locally, Council is working on the development of a tourism strategy to ensure Council and community priorities are well-considered for all marketing and investment in tourism initiatives across the District.

Strategy Framework

14. Council supports the draft Aotearoa New Zealand Government Tourism Strategy and its intent. Council also welcomes a stronger leadership approach from the government, aimed at taking advantage of the opportunities presented by growth in international and domestic travel, and mitigating or avoiding any adverse impacts.
15. Many of Council’s tourism priorities, and those of the CREDS visitor strategy, align with the draft strategy, particularly the aspiration to enrich the Timaru District and Canterbury, through sustainable tourism growth.
16. Like Council, the draft strategy recognises multiple agencies and stakeholders are actively engaged in tourism industry and its associated infrastructure and resources. Clear leadership and guidance from central government is essential to an effectively functioning tourism system. We believe that coordinating the multi-agency responses, and collaborating with stakeholders to support and address the associated challenges is central to the government’s role.

17. We support the government's move to implement an International Visitor and Conservation Tourism Levy and the creation of the Tourism Infrastructure Fund. We look forward to this strategy providing clear guidance for the appropriate and equitable distribution of these funds.
18. Increased engagement and collaboration of central and local government is welcomed and essential to achieving the aims of this strategy, and all local and regional tourism strategies. Council looks forward to working with the government implementing the priority work areas.

Focus Areas for Strategy

19. Council supports the overall focus of the strategy. We believe that that by establishing a national-level direction complemented with regional-level priorities, the strategy is well placed to address the current challenges facing in the New Zealand tourism industry.
20. Council also supports the strategic direction for tourism aligning with the government's economic goals of productive, sustainable and inclusive growth.
21. While the strategy addresses the importance and challenges of the international market well, Council believes that it could be strengthened with further consideration of the domestic market. This would allow for more inclusive growth across the regions. Priority work streams need to be identified to cater for, and encourage New Zealanders to travel within New Zealand: a rejuvenation of the 1980s NZ Tourism campaign "Don't Leave Town until You've Seen the Country" perhaps.
22. More assessment is needed in the classification of regions as "established", "emerging", or "embryonic". While useful in prioritising funding and work streams, these classification as they stand appear to be a blunt tool, focused on traditional concepts of tourist activities and destinations and fails to account for the importance of domestic visitors and the activities and destinations they are attracted to.
23. While recognised tourism regions receive increasing international attention, the total spend in these regions can often be far lower than the domestic tourism spend in some rural and provincial districts across the country, including the Timaru District.
24. Many regions may not be considered "established" tourist destinations, but local event calendars attract high numbers of domestic visitors who contribute considerably to the local economy. Domestic travel in off-peak seasons can also be vital to established, seasonal tourism destinations. It is essential that the strategy recognises the importance of this form of visitor spend and works to shape visitor demand in these regions.

Outcomes

25. Council supports the five outcomes and appreciates the holistic nature of the outcomes and the success indicators.
26. These outcomes align with the work Council is undertaking as a member of CREDS and our own community outcomes. We look forward to working with the government to see these achieved in our district.

Work Programme Priorities

27. Council supports the work programme; it is well considered and strikes an appropriate balance between research and implementation.

Domestic Tourism

28. As already discussed, Council recommends further investigation into how the domestic market can be targeted and developed. We believe this would strengthen the work programme associated with Outcome Four – *New Zealanders' lives are improved by tourism*.
29. A success measure for this outcome states that “tourism is enhancing New Zealanders' experience in their own country and they are able to be involved in its planning/or decision making, both as residents and domestic visitors”, and yet there is little evidence in the work programme of a focus on domestic travel.
30. Council recommends a priority work area be included for nation-wide marketing of the regions, their attractions and events, as an alternative to international travel, to better reflect the aims, and to meet the outcomes, of the strategy.

Transport Network

31. Like government, Council recognises that a coordinated, connected, safe and high quality transport network is central to providing exceptional visitor experiences and ensuring regions and communities benefit from tourism. We support the priority work area to ensure that land transport investment supports safe and resilient transport connections in regional New Zealand.
32. Council recommends a further priority work area to explore the potential of alternative transport modes for the tourism industry, particularly rail. Further, we recommend that the government and its agencies look to increase visitor use of existing rail networks, and explore opportunities for development of the network and services.
33. The Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2018 (GPS) includes an increased focus on tourism connections that are safe, efficient, and resilient and minimise greenhouse gas emissions. The recommended work areas would align with the focus of the GPS and many outcomes of this strategy include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, road accident deaths and injuries and traffic congestion and helping mitigate the decline in social licence related to tourism.

34. As part of the CREDS programme, Mayor Odey has been leading the development of a business case for reintroducing tourism focused, passenger rail services south of Christchurch. Working with KiwiRail and other stakeholders, initial research has identified market interest and operational potential for a regular rail service focused on the tourism and events market, between Christchurch and Dunedin utilising existing rail infrastructure.
35. The government should look to maximise opportunities for regional transportation partnerships such as these to advance the outcomes of this strategy.

Cultural and Historic Heritage

36. The extension of the Landmarks Whenua Tohunga programme to new regions is welcomed, as is government's commitment to fostering a high quality and authentic Māori tourism experience.
37. Council believes more collaboration between central and local government is required to include the wealth of cultural and heritage sites and events owned or administered by local government in the national and regional destination plans.
38. Local government funds cultural and historic sites and events across New Zealand including museums, art galleries, historic sites, botanic gardens, arts and cultural festivals, sporting and seasonal events, which contribute to the national network of visitor attractions.
39. The cost of ongoing maintenance and resourcing, as well as capital costs for development of these sites and events is increasingly challenging in the face of escalating local government costs and the prioritisation of core infrastructure. The work programme needs to consider funding mechanisms for maintenance and development of these important public assets and visitor attractions.
40. These sites and events are located across all regions and most are not seasonally dependant. The diversity and unique cultural and historic experiences that are on offer provide a perfect opportunity for government and all stakeholders to enhance and protect these sites, but also to provide visitors with an exceptional experience.
41. Given the contribution this focus would make to all strategic outcomes, we recommend greater weight be given to promoting, preserving and developing New Zealand's cultural and historic heritage across the regions, and for this to be reflected in the priority work areas.

Conclusion

42. Council applauds the regional focus of the strategy but would urge the government to work closely with local government to ensure the priorities identified in existing regional economic development and tourism strategies are reflected in the implementation of this strategy.

43. Timaru District Council looks forward to working with government to achieve the aims and identified outcomes of the strategy, enhancing the Timaru District, and New Zealand, through sustainable tourism growth.

Recommendations

Timaru District Council recommends:

1. That the final strategy includes much more work targeted at the domestic market and a priority work area be included for nation-wide marketing of the regions, their attractions and events.
2. That the that government and its agencies look to increase visitor use of existing rail networks, and explore opportunities for development of the rail network and services and that this be reflected in the final strategy.
3. That greater priority be given to promoting, preserving and developing New Zealand's cultural and historic heritage across the regions.
4. That engagement and collaboration with local government is central to the implementation of this strategy to ensure that local and regional tourism priorities are reflected.